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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a study that examined the process of building staff commitment during the earliest phase of comprehensive school change, or "courtship" phase. Participant observation in a northwestern urban school district was conducted at three low-achieving elementary schools that implemented the accelerated schools model. Methodology included interviews conducted with 24 teachers, 3 principals, 3 central office administrators, and 2 school board members; observation; informal conversations with parents and staff members; and analyses of background and demographic data. Findings suggest that a whole-school transformation model like accelerated schools is inherently vague, which can cause teacher ambiguity, which in turn saps enthusiasm. Change agents must show how the change model fits with the existing school culture so that it is understood, shared, and developed according to the school context and needs. The principal must be actively involved, use an indirect presentation approach, and understand staff experiences. To be effective and inspiring, principals need clear visions of how their roles will change and how classrooms will eventually look. Because finding time is a problem, schools should expect to devote 2-3 months for courtship activities. (Contains 24 references.) (LMI)

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Courtship and School Restructuring: Building Early Commitment to School Change for At-Risk Students

Preliminary Findings of a Research Study

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1. Introduction

This research project examines the process of building staff commitment during the earliest phase of a comprehensive school change process. This earliest phase, or "courtship," is where initiators of school change (i.e., district leaders, building principals, teachers, university faculty) engage schools and school staffs in a discussion of the need for change and a model for change, and attempt to garner the initial commitment and support needed to embark upon a major school restructuring. The goal of the courtship phase is to begin building a shared meaning and commitment around a particular change model and to achieve a "critical mass" of staff support so that efforts to restructure the school can begin.

Compelled by powerful ideas and pressed to make school change happen quickly, school leaders frequently ignore or underestimate the importance of building commitment and creating shared meaning during the early stages of the change project. This study is intended to guide school leaders who initiate and implement whole-school restructuring projects. It will provide a framework and a means for understanding the pre-implementation and early implementation activities that are necessary for sustained commitment and success of long term change projects.

This study uses the implementation of Henry Levin's (1987) Accelerated School model (in three elementary schools located in a Northwestern urban district) as a vehicle for studying the courtship phase of a systematic school restructuring process. The accelerated school model was chosen because it is a well-developed restructuring model for schools serving at-risk students. Accelerated schools has become a national movement and represents a whole-school change process that requires long-term commitment and support by all of the stakeholders involved. The study is not an evaluation of accelerated schools or its efficacy, but rather uses accelerated schools to examine the early implementation of a whole-school restructuring project.

This paper presents our first-year preliminary results which focus on using courtship activities to build early commitment to a school change project.

The Accelerated School Model

Accelerated schools are elementary schools designed to bring all students up to grade level by the end of elementary school. The schools are driven by the motto, "accelerate, don't remediate," and a premise borrowed from John Dewey, "what we want for our own children, we must want for all children" (Levin, 1990). Accelerated schools are founded on the belief that the key to student change is through the development of staff and community knowledge and capacity for inquiry into school problems.

Levin (1989, p.47) defines at risk students as "those who lack home and community resources to benefit from conventional schooling practices." Such a definition says less about a student than a situation where there is a mismatch between the kinds of resources and experiences in the home and the community and the kinds that are expected in the school. According to the model, conventional schools have failed to meet the needs of at -risk students. The typical school response to low student achievement has been remedial education. The results have generally led to a loss of student self-esteem, lowered expectations, few deadlines, slower pace, and less accountability. Paradoxically, many responses to student failure have called for higher standards or intensification of existing instructional programs. One teacher, in a San Francisco accelerated school, described these sort of responses as "drill and kill" and remedial education as "drudgery." Overall, there is a lack of exposure to interesting ideas and

concepts to ensure the mastery of basics. Consequently, much of what is learned is not stimulating, relevant, interesting, or connected to the lives of students.

Accelerated schools are based on a belief that approaches used to educate gifted and talented students will be even more meaningful and relevant for at-risk students. Accelerate does not mean simply speeding up learning; it means learning more. In fact, "less is more" when students have in-depth learning experiences. The accelerated school model does not require schools to adopt specific instructional techniques or curricular programs. However, several general approaches and principles are advocated. Instruction should be active, "hands-on," well paced, collaborative, and designed to meet the needs and interest of students so that they are genuinely motivated to learn. The curriculum should be enriched and integrated rather than remedial. Critical thinking should be stressed rather than the learning of specific facts and skills. Every day problems should be incorporated into the curriculum whenever possible.

Accelerated schools are organized around three governing bodies which together form a site-based management structure. First, cadres of staff and parents work on the accomplishment of identified school priorities through a systematic problem solving process known as the Inquiry process. Second, a steering committee, composed of the principal and representatives from the various cadres, sets policy and convenes cadres as needed. Finally, the site as a whole, or whole staff and parents, meets to endorse or vote on policies that will affect the entire school.

Finally, three guiding principles are brought to bear and direct all decisions in relationship to the school curriculum, instruction, and organization:

- **Unity of purpose,** in which personal visions are forged into a shared vision of what the school is all about so that everything and everyone works toward the same vision.
- **Decision making with responsibility** (also called empowerment with responsibility), in which those who know the school best and are closest to the classroom have a say in the development of the school's curriculum, instruction, and organization. As staff and parents feel increasingly responsible for student success, they will avoid blaming others for school problems.
- **Building on strengths,** in which staff focus on student strengths rather than deficits. (Levin, 1990).

The Setting and "Courtship"

The three schools involved in this study -- which were given the pseudonyms of Bridgeport, Clark, and Seaside -- are among the lowest achieving elementary schools in the region. Despite a number of effective teachers and numerous classroom curricular/instructional improvement projects, these schools have remained "stuck" in the lowest five percent in third grade student achievement in both mathematics and reading. A socioeconomic ranking of area elementary schools, based on attendance, student mobility, and parent education and income levels, reveals that the schools are located in the one of the city's most disadvantaged areas. Furthermore, within this school attendance area lies the largest concentration of public owned housing in the region. These housing projects have traditionally been racially segregated and pose numerous sociological problems to the schools and the community.

The three schools are "sister schools" located within several miles of each other, and are together embarking on the implementation of accelerated schools under the guidance of a leadership team comprised of the three school principals; a teacher representative from each school; the district administrator with direct line authority over the three schools and his instructional specialist; a curriculum department administrator; and the two authors of this paper who serve as university facilitators. This leadership team led the three schools through a three-month planned "courtship" before the final decision was made to implement accelerated schools.

The purpose of this courtship was to give the three school staffs enough information and enough time to learn about the model, an opportunity to discuss the model among themselves, and a chance to observe the model in action through school visits so that they could make an informed choice about whether or not to embark on the accelerated schools path. The major courtship activities were: attendance by the leadership team to a one-week Accelerated Schools Summer Academy conducted by Stanford University; dissemination of written materials and videotapes about accelerated schools to each staff; short presentations and interactive exercises meant to introduce accelerated school concepts; a visit by Henry Levin to visit the three schools and make a joint presentation to the three staffs; and visits and one long-distance conference calls by teachers to operating accelerated schools in the region. Near the end of the courtship, all school staffs were asked to vote on the model and all three voted affirmatively (with virtually 100% agreeing within each school) to begin the process of becoming an accelerated school.

Currently, the authors of this paper are both facilitating and documenting the implementation of these three accelerated schools. They are trying to make sense of a complex restructuring process and trying to provide evidence of how "restructured" schools can benefit

at-risk students. They have worked for over three years with the district's curriculum department, the area superintendent, the three school principals, and with many staff members and parents to stimulate and facilitate this restructuring process.

Finally, it is recognized that this study is, in a sense, a study of externally imposed change in that the accelerated school project was initiated by central office administrators working with university facilitators, and offered to the schools to adopt on a voluntary basis. As such, the task of convincing the schools to adopt the model becomes paramount. What we describe as "courtship" in the paper may be described by others as "wooing" or "selling." Accordingly, the importance of "courtship" activities, especially in external change projects, must be recognized and underlined.

Overview of the Paper

In the following two sections of the paper, the study's theoretical framework and research methodology will be described. Then, the preliminary results are presented in two sections: the meaning of change and the role of leadership. Finally, the paper ends with a section on the lessons learned and conclusions, including a discussion of the problem of time and pacing in implementing change projects.

2. Theoretical Framework

Accelerated Schools is one of several prominent national restructuring models for schools serving at-risk students. It is a model which truly attempts to transform a school through an interweaving of both school process and school content changes, and which strives to create a school where local problem-solving and continuous improvement become the means to accelerated student learning. Like all models of restructuring, however, it advocates a particular point of view about what needs to be changed most and what the focal point of the "restructuring" should be. Using Elmore's (1990) typology of school restructuring models, Levin's accelerated schools is perhaps best described as *reforming the occupational conditions of teaching* in that it creates a school organization where teachers assume greater responsibility for identifying and solving the school's problems, and for cultivating their own teaching practice as well as the practice of their peers. In accelerated schools, building teacher capacity is the key to accelerating the learning of all students. The model also includes elements of what Elmore (1990) calls *reforming relationships between schools and their clients* in that it stresses building an inclusive school community that engages parents and other community members as partners in education.

While the above discussion helps place accelerated schools within the context of the school restructuring movement, it tells little about the model's successful implementation, which of course is the major focus of this study. In conceptualizing this research, we have developed a four-phase change model to describe the successful implementation of an accelerated school. The hypothesized four phases of successful implementation are:

- Courtship
- Training and Development
- Changing School Structure and Culture
- Changing Classroom Practices

The *courtship* phase is where initiators of the reforms (in this case, university faculty and district and building administrators) engage school staffs in a discussion of the need for change and a model for change, and in the end garner the initial commitment and support needed to embark upon a major school transformation such as accelerated schools. The goal of the courtship phase is to begin building a shared meaning and commitment around a particular reform model, and to achieve a "critical mass" of staff support so that efforts to restructure the school can begin. In our study site, the process of courtship was consciously built into the project.[1]

The *training and development* phase is where school staffs receive training in the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are required for the model to succeed. In accelerated schools, the requisite skills and knowledge include working in teacher teams, group process and meeting skills, using an inquiry process to identify and solve school problems, and knowledge of instructional and curricular practices that create powerful learning experiences for all children. Part of the training and development is to also instill in teachers the work norms of collegiality and continuous improvement.

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[1] It should be noted that the three-month "courtship" activities described in section 1 were developed locally and are not necessarily the way other school staffs in other sites have been introduced to the model.

The third phase is the *structural and cultural* phase where real changes in school structure and culture are introduced, experimented with, and refined for a particular school site. Changing school structure and culture are placed together because they must be integrated and must support each other. In the accelerated school model, changes in school structure and culture include implementing a new governance structure and decision making/leadership roles of teachers and principal, creation of a collaborative and team-oriented work culture, increased parent and community involvement, and a continual focus on a school vision and goals that are developed by the entire school community.

Finally, the last and most critical phase for student learning is the *classroom practices* phase where structural and cultural changes penetrate into the classroom and lead to real changes in the curriculum and teachers' instruction and practice. It is only when this last phase is in place that improvements in student learning can be expected to occur.

This four-step process corresponds roughly to what Rosenblum and Louis (1981) have called the rational model of school change, where change is viewed as a logical, sequential process of readiness, initiation, implementation, and continuation (a framework originally developed by Berman & McLaughlin, 1976). We propose our four-phase model only as an oversimplified description of the key change areas and their rough sequence. The change process itself is much more complicated and much less linear and rational than these four phases imply. Change is best viewed within a systems framework which recognizes that planned change is embedded within an existing school structure, culture, environment, and a set of inputs that can impede or support school transformation (Rosenblum & Louis, 1981). Non-rational processes as well as rational planning are part of the change process, most notably the political

and social pressures within and outside of the school that can help or hinder change. Moving beyond systems theory, some reformers see chaos theory as an even better way to capture the messy reality of school change; that is, change that is guided by instinct rather than by rational planning, and that attempts to redirect school energy from existing friction points and dissatisfactions to productive goals and work. In this view change becomes more opportunistic and more dynamic, and less a process of implementing a sequence of planned activities or well-rehearsed change scripts (Cushman, 1993).

The central premise of this research is that in the press to make school reform happen quickly, schools tend to pay insufficient attention to the early foundational phases (i.e., courtship, training and development, and figuring out how to change a school's culture) and move quickly into changing school structure and classroom practices. This is a tempting approach because it is these latter changes that are most directly tied to student improvement. Yet, the research on school change has pointed to the folly of laying an insufficient groundwork. School change efforts tend to fail when they are purely top-down or centrally designed with little consideration given to building teacher commitment, ownership, and personal meaning; when they fail to provide needed training and professional development; and when they ignore the cultural, structural, and environmental aspects of the school that are needed to change teacher attitudes and behaviors (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976; Fullan, 1982; Hall & Hourd, 1987; Rosenblum & Louis, 1981; Sarason, 1971).

A recent example is provided in a study by Wehlage, Smith and Lipman (1992) of the educational component of the Casey Foundation's *New Futures* program. The study involved a year three mid-course assessment of a five-year effort to restructure middle, junior high, and

high schools in four medium-sized cities. The study points to some valuable lessons about just how difficult the restructuring process is, including 1) that one should not expect change to happen rapidly and promise too much too soon; 2) that top-down reform without the input of principals and teachers does not work; and 3) that much needs to be done to train and develop staff for new roles and responsibilities in restructured schools (Cohen, 1991; Wehlage, Smith & Lipman, 1992). The main point here is that school reform efforts must build a foundation of human commitment and organizational support before changes in core instructional and curricular practices are attempted.

Given the accelerated school focus on building teacher capacity and creating site-based decision making, we have chosen to focus our research on two critical issues in the early implementation of this model: the *meaning of change* and the *role of leadership* in the early change process. In essence, this research is directed towards uncovering and studying some of the key issues that can "make or break" reform in its early stages.

3. Methodology

This research used a qualitative case study methodology to document and understand the courtship and early implementation process in an accelerated school project. The analysis involved looking at both the accelerated schools project as a whole and key differences among the three individual school sites participating in the project (what Yin, 1984, calls embedded units-of-analysis). Thus, the analysis focused on global project findings as well as what school-to-school comparisons revealed to us about the processes under study.

The study was conducted in the tradition of participant observation in that both authors, acting as university facilitators, were involved in helping design and carry out the courtship and implementation activities which they were at the same time studying. This allowed something of an insiders view and an opportunity to study the change process as it was unfolding rather than after the fact. This approach helped us more fully understand the organizational and human dynamics of the change process. This approach, however, does have some limitations in that we were not totally neutral parties, and were ourselves stakeholders in the change process. On balance, however, the advantages of this approach far surpassed its limitations. To help alleviate any personal bias of the researchers, all interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed and coded before the field notes were analyzed. Procedures described by Miles and Huberman (1984) and Yin (1984) were also used to increase reliability and validity. Further, both researchers worked together in collecting data at all three schools so that there was a built-in perception check during the analysis phase. In the next step of the research, we will share these preliminary findings with some of the participants to help test and affirm our own interpretations, and have them offer any alternative explanations or new insights.

The following data sources were used:

- Semi-structured interviews with the following key informants: twenty-four teachers from the three schools; each school's principal; three key central office administrators (the curriculum director, another curriculum administrator, and the area supervisor) who were directly involved in the project; and two school board members to learn more about the district and political context.

- Meeting notes from monthly steering committee meetings and retreats held by the leadership team, all of which the authors themselves participated in.

- Our own observations and notes as we worked with the leadership team and the schools on courtship and early staff training and development activities.

- Numerous visits to the three schools which provided opportunities for unstructured observations of school and classroom life.

- Informal conversations with some parents and staff members.

- Background and demographic data on the schools and neighborhoods.

Other baseline data, including data on students, has also been collected to chart future change in these schools.

It should be noted that at the time of this writing, all three schools have been "launched" into the accelerated school process, have completed the process of taking stock and writing their school visions, have set school priority areas, and are beginning to implement the new shared governance structures. The key-person interviews, which were the main data source for this phase of the research, were conducted *after* the courtship activities and the voting were completed, but *before* the official "launch" which included two days of intensive training provided by the Stanford Accelerated Schools Project.

The analysis that follows is both descriptive and interpretive. In presenting our findings, we tried to interweave both rich description (including the words of the participants themselves) and more generalized interpretations.

4. The Meaning of Change

In order for a school change project to take hold and succeed, people at all levels (teachers, parents, principals, district administrators) must assimilate the change into their own constructions of reality and their own belief and value systems (Fullan, 1982; Sarason, 1971). A major challenge of successful implementation is to integrate the various individual subjective meanings of the key participants into a *shared* meaning and a shared school culture. This challenge begins as early as the courtship phase because while the initiators of the change may have already assimilated its meaning and developed a vision of what *they* want to accomplish, the teachers, staff members, and parents coming into the project may lack a clear sense of what the reform means to them or their school. There may also be competing ideas of what needs to be done in the school and how this particular reform effort will help.

Reformers who ignore the meaning of change from the various stakeholder perspectives do so at their own peril, because concerns, issues, and differing points of view left unaddressed in the early stages can result in a loss of commitment and even sabotage in later stages. Understanding the meaning of change helps change agents identify pockets of resistance and conflicting points of view, and understanding how meanings initially differ helps one manage the change process rather than requiring that everyone and every school follow the same prescribed path (Muncey & McQuillan as reported in Coalition for Essential Schools, 1993). Fullan (1982) has noted how different stakeholder groups focus on different facets of the change in constructing their own meaning; for example, how teachers tend to adopt a "practicality ethic" and see what the change means for their everyday work and their students, while the principal,

as the classic administrator caught in the middle, views the change both in terms of district pressures from above and staff concerns and complaints from below.

Given the prominent importance of the meaning of change, this section will deal with how the various participants in the accelerated school project viewed the model at the outset; that is, what accelerated schools meant to them personally, what they viewed as its strengths and weaknesses, and what they hoped it would accomplish for their school and students. The analysis will focus on 1) a description of the commonalities and differences among the various stakeholder groups (teachers, principals, and district administrators who were directly involved in the project) and among the three schools, and 2) two countervailing themes that emerged in the interviews on the meaning of change -- *ambiguity* and *fit*.

Meaning Among Different Stakeholder Groups and Schools

The interviews of teachers, principals, and central office administrators took place after the courtship was completed and all three school staffs had voted affirmatively to begin the accelerated school process. The courtship was designed to be a learning and information sharing period so that through written materials, videotapes, an invited address by Henry Levin to the three staffs, visits to operating accelerated schools, and inservice activities, the staffs of Bridgeport, Clark, and Seaside were given an introduction to the model, its rationale and guiding principles, and were allowed to observe the model in action. Hence, staff members were exposed to the model, but our interviews indicated that many still felt in the dark about what accelerated schools fully meant. Yet, they were beginning to construct their own meanings

based on the courtship experience, and it is these initial meanings that were captured in the interviews.

Looking across the stakeholder groups (principals, teachers, and three central office administrators involved directly in the project), there were some shared meanings that related to the strong guiding principles of the model and, very likely, to the common courtship experience that all participated in to varying degrees. But there were also some divergent points of view about what accelerated schools meant and what it could do for school and students. There were likewise commonalities and differences across the three school sites.

Principals. Overall, the three principals tended to agree more than they disagreed on what accelerated schools meant and what it could do for their school. What principals focused on most in discussing the meaning of the model was its potential to empower both the school site and the teaching staff. "We create our own schools" was a common view of all three principals. In the words of the Bridgeport principal:

> Accelerated schools isn't a menu. It isn't a cookbook, it isn't a recipe. It is something you make yourself. No one else can tell you what the outcome is going to be like. They can give you some ideas of what the process was like for them and what the outcome was for them, but nobody else can really lay it out for you. This is a powerful strength, but it is also very difficult. Because in our profession we are used to having new programs come with a real recipe. We are not really used to being treated as thinking professionals.

All principals likewise felt that empowering teachers with more decision making *and* responsibility was a key strength of the model, pointing out that this will lead to both better problem solving and decisions, and a more professional teaching staff. A second strong theme which the three principals focused on was unity of purpose. They all saw accelerated schools as a means of bringing focus to the school agenda and of unifying the staff and parents; in the

words of the Seaside principal, "a pulling together of the entire school community." Finally, a third common theme was student success. All three principals felt strongly about the principles "accelerate, don't remediate" and of building on student strengths in developing teaching strategies.

While there were many commonalities among the principals, there were also some important differences. At Bridgeport, the principal (who had many years of experience) had a greater sense of urgency about the need for change and viewed accelerated schools as a powerful site-based management strategy, a strategy she felt comfortable with because of her previous experience in implementing site-based management at her previous school. She was ready to do this again at her new school and viewed accelerated schools as a "better framework" for site-based management. At Seaside, accelerated schools was seen as a way to improve communication within the school and to protect the school from the typical onslaught of district-mandated reforms. The Seaside principal also saw accelerated schools as a professional development opportunity for himself: "Any way that I can add another tool to my professional repertoire, you know, I felt would have been beneficial." Finally, at Clark the principal was focused on using accelerated principles to help students become more engaged in school and learning, and thereby help solve discipline problems. The Clark principal, who like the one at Seaside was new to the principalship, also saw accelerated schools and its training as an opportunity for her own professional development as well as the development of her staff who wanted more involvement in school decisions.

Teachers. For teachers, there were a variety of views about what accelerated schools really meant and what it could do for the school, but also some common themes across all 24

teachers who were interviewed as well as some consistency within each school. Teachers focused on some of the same global concepts that principals did; particularly, empowerment and, to a lesser extent, unity of purpose. The sentiment here was that accelerated schools would allow all of staff to be in charge together, as represented by the following quote from a Seaside teacher:

> There was a group that always, I think, pretty much ran a lot of the educational administration choices in the building. This is why I think this would be a good model because there will not be one top person. We'll all be in charge. Hopefully, this will work. And if it doesn't, that will be because some people can't quite relinquish that kind of power. I think that's another thing. There is no key person. The principal up there, of course, has final say and is accountable to the district. But I think this program is trying to say, at least the principal was giving all his power to his professional people and then parent volunteers, and any other support people. I think that's good. I think it should be a group effort instead of one person controlling.

Referring to the responsibility that goes with empowerment, one Clark teacher commented:

> There are some things that I see accelerated schools helping, and that is in bringing more parents in, and also in maybe taking some of the load from the principal as far as budget and not only that, but the heat for how well children are doing seems to fall on her shoulders. I think we should all have an active responsibility in setting the climate for the school and implementing programs and working to bring these children to where they should be, to their potential. I think that not only will it make the principal's job in working with parents easier, but my job maybe a little more interesting. I don't feel now that we have a lot of say in how funds are used in the building...So I see this as a way of working as a group.

In general, teachers were more apt to focus on teaching, learning, and student success, in contrast to principals who mentioned student and teaching issues but were more focused on the operation of the school. Many teachers saw the potential of the motto "accelerate don't remediate" for their students and for bringing better teaching practices into the school for children in at-risk situations. Accelerated schools was seen as a way to "help students who may

get lost along the way," to treat the whole child, and to stop labeling and stigmatizing children through the principle of building on strengths and through teaching practices that had the potential to increase student engagement, esteem, and performance. Finally, it should be pointed that each school had a handful of cynics; that is, teachers who either worried that accelerated schools was another passing fad or felt that the model was ill-equipped to address *real* school problems like crowded classrooms and inadequate budgets.

While all teachers echoed some common themes, there were also important variations across the three schools that indicated how teachers tended to view the model's potential largely in terms of the school's most pressing problems. For example, at Bridgeport (the school with the lowest achievement test scores and the worst reputation), teachers saw accelerated schools as a way to lift staff morale, raise expectations for students, and increase student motivation. At Seaside (a school which eventually formed a Staff Communication problem solving cadre after setting its school priorities), a repeated theme was using accelerated schools to "focus" the staff and improve communication and collaboration among teachers. Finally, at Clark (a school where there had been several strong teacher leaders present for many years), accelerated schools was seen as a way to equalize decision making power among the staff. Thus, teachers were not only concerned with global concepts like empowerment, unity of purpose, and student success, but with how accelerated schools would address the everyday problems in *their* school that made their jobs difficult and that served as barriers to student success.

Central office administrators. The central office administrators had a markedly different perspective on what accelerated schools meant, although they certainly shared some of the same sentiments with teachers and principals about the importance of local school decision making,

teacher empowerment and capacity building, and how schools must accelerate rather than remediate inner city students. District administrators tended to take a more systemic and visionary view of the change process; that is, accelerated schools as a means to ensure that the *whole* school changes rather than change in "bits and pieces." The strongest issue and concern among the two curriculum department administrators (who had initiated the accelerated school effort along with one of the university facilitators authoring this report) was that accelerated schools be more than just a change in organizational processes, but be something that permeates the classroom and has a strong impact on children. In the words of the curriculum director:

> My caution and my major concern is that there not be too much emphasis on the structure and the organization because I think structure and organization can vary and still succeed, but the structure and organization can become the end in itself and can become meaningless activity. And I think it's really important that not happen. So if the focus stays on curriculum and instruction, the goal is to improve instruction for kids. The goal is to accelerate the learning of all kids. And if that's always kept front and center, the committees [cadres] are a tool toward that end. I think there have been lots of innovations tried and the tools become the end. That's my biggest caution and my biggest worry. You can actually end up sucking out a lot of energy into organization and it actually detracts from the focus.

Similarly, the district administrator overseeing the three schools believed that a model like accelerated schools must do more than change organizational decision making, but must ensure that decisions focus on important matters that affect students. Otherwise, shared governance becomes "like a hamster wheel" where time is spent making decisions about relatively unimportant matters. Finally, also related to the view of whole-school change, all three administrators believed accelerated schools was a means to a school becoming a place of "continuous improvement" and "self-renewal."

The district administrators, as expected, also tended to adopt a more political view of accelerated schools in addition to seeing the model for its own worth. This is not to say that they saw the model as pure political opportunism. On the contrary, all three were genuinely committed to the model and in fact viewed themselves as district risk-takers who, to some extent, had gone out on the limb when the effort to bring accelerated schools into the district began some three years ago. However, they all saw the political side too and felt that the time was now right for accelerated schools given a strong push from both a new superintendent and from state legislators towards site-based management. Also, all three schools were so-called "targeted schools" that had been identified by the school board for serious improvement efforts to raise low student test scores, and accelerated schools was an opportunity to do something to address this problem.

While the three central office administrators involved in the project appeared to be cohesive and together at this early stage of the project, one important point made in the interviews was that in a highly centralized district with a strong curriculum department and school board, friction can develop if site-based decisions begin to fall out of the bounds of what the central office and board think of as appropriate curricular and instructional practices. Hence, even when there is a high degree of shared meaning at the outset between administrators close to the school site and those close to the executive office, this can change as the implementation proceeds. When school sites begin making their own decisions, there is the possibility of conflict among top, mid-level, and site administrators regarding appropriate curricular and instructional practices.

In summary, there were many common views of accelerated schools across the various stakeholder groups: the importance of school and teacher empowerment, the need to accelerate rather than remediate inner-city children, and the need to create a unity of purpose within these schools to make things move forward. But there were also some important differences between the various stakeholder groups. While teachers were most concerned with having accelerated schools solve everyday problems that make their worklives difficult and interfere with student learning, central office administrators were most concerned with systemic change, and in particular with making sure that organizational changes penetrated into the classroom. They also were more astute about the political situation and, in this case, how the political winds were now blowing more strongly in favor of accelerated schools. Principals fell somewhere in between, being concerned with their local school problems but also seeing the larger potential of accelerated schools. There was also a different sense of urgency across the three schools, with Bridgeport (the "lowest of the low" in achievement scores and the school that had been most maligned by local press coverage) feeling the greatest need for change and a push for change from its principal. It is noteworthy here that the Bridgeport principal was, among the three, the most experienced principal and the only one with previous experience in implementing site-based management.

Two Countervailing Forces: Ambiguity and Fit

During the early phase of courtship (before the two-day intensive staff training to "launch" these accelerated schools was held), participants were beginning to form personal meanings but were also struggling with what a change project like accelerated schools *really*

meant. Thus, one strong theme that came across among teachers was a sense of *ambiguity*. This sense of ambiguity was expressed primarily by teachers and, to a lesser extent, by two of the principals. A feeling of ambiguity was especially prominent among Seaside teachers. The finding that teachers felt more ambiguity than the other stakeholders is explainable, at least in part, by the fact that the others (the principals, one teacher representative from each school, the three district administrators, and the two university facilitators) all attended a week-long Accelerated School Summer Academy together, where they received intensive training in the model and talked to other schools in the national network.[2] Thus, unlike this "leadership team," teachers (except for the few who attended the academy) has less exposure to the model and did not share the team building experience of the group who attended the academy. Teachers were more likely to feel a sense of ambiguity towards the model even though many teachers visited and talked to other teachers from two accelerated schools as part of the courtship.

Much of the teacher sense of ambiguity centered around the model being more of a set of guiding principles and a process of change rather than a "packaged" curriculum and instruction program. From two different Seaside teachers:

> I think a lot of people came away [from the Hank Levin address] still saying, what is an accelerated school? I think people want someone to tell them this is what it is and they don't realize that we have to create it. *(Question: That's a paradigm shift.)* Yeah, it's a huge on in education given all the prepackaged things in the past.
>
> Maybe it's inherently fuzzy because it says we're going to take and work with this particular school to decide what this school needs and how we're going to push all the kids as hard and fast as possible. So in this sense it will probably be

[2] It should be noted that the principal and teacher representative from Bridgeport did not attend the Summer Academy because Bridgeport came into the project a little bit later than the other two schools.

> different at every school, and there is no boiler-plate model, that it must in essence change from school to school.

From one Bridgeport teacher talking about comments she heard from others:

> A lot of comments about what does this mean, what do we do? It's really hard to self-start this kind of thing because we don't have a blueprint. And I guess that's the point that you don't have a blueprint. You make it yourself.

While most teachers seemed frustrated and uncomfortable with the inherent ambiguity of the model, one Seaside teacher expressed a more positive attitude:

> I just think it's kind of vague in the way it's been introduced. I'm comfortable with it, but I've heard from others that they're not. As a teacher you just hear all kinds of new things that are going to save the world and they fade away. It's easy to dismiss things when you don't really have a grasp on what it is. Maybe I don't either. But I think probably it's up to us to make it what it's going to be. I feel like if you go into it positively, you can make it more than it's even supposed to be.

This last teacher expressed optimism about the model's ambiguity, but her comments also reflect a theme expressed by other teachers as well -- that too much prolonged ambiguity can lead to a loss of enthusiasm towards the model (i.e., "easy to dismiss things when you don't really have a grasp on what it is"). It is ironic that accelerated schools is viewed *positively* as a means of "creating our own school" (see the earlier section about empowerment), but at the same time is *threatening* to many teachers who are all too often told what to do rather than being given the empowerment and responsibility to shape their own school.

A strong discomfort with the model's ambiguity at Seaside compared with much less concern and discomfort with ambiguity at the other two schools. When several Seaside teachers who expressed a sense of ambiguity were asked if this was due to lack of information or the model itself, all said that it was more the model itself rather than the information (or lack of it) presented to the school. One Seaside teacher estimated that half of the staff really did not

understand the model (an estimate consistent with the prevalence of this sentiment in the interviews) and that those who did not understand felt uncomfortable about this. This was surprising given that all three schools went through the same basic courtship activities. One explanation for this finding is offered.

At Seaside, the principal was a vocal advocate for accelerated schools during the courtship phase. In contrast, the Bridgeport principal was a strong advocate of the principles and ideas behind accelerated schools (such as building on strengths and group problem solving), but did not push the model per se. In fact, she did not even mention the model's name when she did some early inservice exercises to introduce concepts like building on strengths. At Clark, the principal "soft-pedalled" the model during courtship because she did not want to push it on her staff whom she felt did not take well to things being pushed on them. An important point here is that at both Bridgeport and Clark, teachers were given the opportunity to research and vote on other change models when considering accelerated schools, while at Seaside teachers were not presented with alternatives. The procedures used for voting on the model also revealed that the Seaside principal was putting some pressure on his staff to accept the model. Seaside teachers were asked to sign their names to a voting ballot compared to secret ballots at the other two schools. The principal said he did this so that he could "talk to" those who voted negatively. One Seaside teacher described the courtship and voting at his school as "being influenced..but not coerced." Hence, the fact that Seaside's principal was pushing the model harder than the other two may have raised anxiety levels among Seaside teachers; that is, a feeling that our principal is really behind this, but we are still having trouble understanding exactly what is.

If ambiguity made some teachers uncomfortable, a countervailing force was a strong sense that the model was also a good *fit* for: 1) individual teachers and, in the case of young teachers just out of graduate school, their training and preparation; 2) the school and where it wanted to go anyway (e.g., toward more site-based management); and most importantly 3) the curricular and instructional principles and practices already in place in schools and the school district. The curricular and instructional philosophy of accelerated schools -- which includes whole language, enriched curriculum, cooperative learning, push-in rather than pull-out Chapter 1 and special education programs -- "fit this district like a glove" in the views of the central office administrators, the principals, and many teachers. Some teachers felt like the classroom practices advocated by accelerated schools were "something we were already doing" and therefore could do even better than other accelerated schools." This sense of fit, it seems, would work to dampen any loss of enthusiasm or commitment due to the model's ambiguity.

Finally, there was one noteworthy school difference finding with regard to fit. At Bridgeport, the principal's expressed vision for the school and her own philosophy of school site-based management and enriched curriculum was a very close fit to accelerated school principles. In contrast, Clark's principal felt that accelerated schools was the right model for her staff and students, but also had more reservations about the model's curricular and instructional practices. At Seaside, there was less of a strong vision of how the model fit where the school wanted to go. This idea of vision and fit is developed further in the next section on leadership.

Summary

If meaning is socially constructed reality, then the common courtship experience shared by all participants had apparently resulted in some shared meaning as these schools embarked on the accelerated school restructuring process. Most participants were drawn together towards to the model's potential to empower schools, teachers, and school communities. Most were also attracted to the principle of "accelerate, don't remediate." Based on the interviews, there seemed to be no major underlying conflicts about what the model meant or what it should accomplish. However, there were different perspectives for participants in different organizational roles. There was also a sense of ambiguity and discomfort for many teachers who felt they were entering a real "paradigm shift" from the types of packaged reforms they were more used to, but at the same time dissatisfied with. Some teachers suggested in their comments that this sense of ambiguity, left un attended, can sap any initial enthusiasm and commitment to the model. It is also very likely that some of this expressed discomfort with the model was due to the discomfort of the change process itself. In any case, this sense of teacher ambiguity was countervailed by a sense that this model was a good fit for individual teachers, schools, and the district.

5. The Role of Leadership

This section of the paper attempts to offer examples of what the initiators of school restructuring can do to promote commitment during the earliest or courtship phase of the change process. These examples emerged as patterns of leadership pertaining to *understanding* and *vision*. In our study, principals clearly emerged as central in building commitment to school change. This does not preclude the possibility that in other schools or different situations, teacher leaders or program facilitators might emerge as the primary initiators of school change.

Understanding

Joyce, Hersh, & McKibbin (1983; p. 71) in reviewing research on implementation of innovations state:

> The less explicit the characteristics and rational of the innovation, the more likely there will be user confusion and frustration and a low degree of implementation.

Furthermore, Levin (1989) in describing the principal of an all minority Chicago Heights school, points out:

> This woman hit the ground running. She just understood the ideas right away. She really communicated the ideas with her staff...they picked up on it and that school is just unbelievable.

What the above statements confirm is that initiators of school change need to understand their particular school innovation well. This observation seems rather obvious and simplistic, yet Joyce, Hersh & Mckibbin make a similar conclusion:

> Result seem to boil down to the common sense proposition that the more thoroughly one understands something the more likely one is to master it and be committed to using it.

Ensuring principal understanding can be difficult to realize. Some principals are quite experienced and able to make expert moves or decisions while others are novices and possess very limited repertoires. In many districts, principals are regularly reassigned. Often there is a poor match or principals are assigned to schools in the middle of a restructuring effort process not knowing what it is all about.

Furthermore, understanding is more than just receiving training and reading the literature. It's related to one's world view or vision of what schooling is all about. Some individuals will never, as Levin says, "have a clue" because they either have no vision or their own personal vision is out of alignment with the model of schooling they find themselves responsible for implementing. Sometimes they get involved in school change for the wrong reasons. They use the model or program as a symbolic means of signifying that they are doing something significant about their at-risk students. A commitment is made at a symbolic or ritualistic level rather than at a substantive and transforming level, and the model is used for recognition or as a means of gaining needed resources.

Thus, fully understanding the restructuring model and what it entails is critical. Information, discussions, and research need to precede the decision to implement the model and should be geared towards the school's particular context and level of development. Any ambiguity of fuzziness needs to be clarified with concrete examples. Several key findings about leadership and understanding emerged from our research, which are presented below.

Understanding the model. Principals need to fully understand the model before introducing and trying to clarify it for teachers and staff. We met two types of teachers in our experience working with Bridgeport, Clark, and Seaside schools. The first type, clearly in the

minority, felt very comfortable with the model and wanted to use it to build on their previous training and methods they were currently using as individual classroom teachers. They had no problem understanding and accepting that the accelerated school model is a process, not a package or "cookie-cutter" approach for school restructuring. They felt excited about the prospect of empowerment and having the opportunity to shape their school into what they wanted it to become. They looked forward to improving school communication and working more collaboratively with their colleagues.

The second type of teacher we encountered felt as though they didn't fully understand the accelerated school model. They responded:

> Where do we go, what does this mean, what do we do?
>
> It's really hard to self start this kind of thing because we don't have a blueprint.
>
> You keep hearing that each school will evolve differently. Well what's the same?

How principals responded to these types of questions and concerns was critical to building early staff commitment and moving the process along.

At Bridgeport -- the school moving fastest and farthest along in implementing accelerated schools -- the principal was an experienced veteran. She "had moved to site-based management" at her previous school. She felt that the accelerated school model and being part of a national network offered a "better framework" for school change than the one she had previously developed on her own. She felt confident about the first steps she had taken with her staff and basically would not do things differently if she were going to start the process over. This principal also demonstrated an astute and critical understanding of the model and its dynamics.

> I was thinking about accelerate don't remediate, academic outcome benefits for students rather than remediate and trying to dummy down the curriculum, pulling

kids out, fixing them and then sticking them back in, not really having a classroom teacher be central to what happens to these kids.

There is going to be lots of ambiguity even way into the process and we have to be willing to have that. Because accelerated schools isn't a recipe. It is something you make yourself, no one else can tell you what the outcome is going to be like. They can give you some ideas of what the outcome was for them, but nobody else can really lay it out for you...In our profession we are used to having new programs come with a real recipe.

Teachers at Bridgeport School referred to their principals leadership style as:

She does what she says she will. I really feel she's going to follow through.

She comes to staff meetings with lots of wonderful ideas and asks for input which is wonderful.

Very dynamic. Willing to embrace new ideas. Energetic. She's always got something going on.

She's modeled a lot of things already for us.

It was really interesting to watch a cooperative lesson being done on us. You know it was really good modeling.

Clearly, the Bridgeport principal demonstrated a conceptual understanding of accelerated schools. But she also demonstrated to her staff that she possessed the requisite leadership skills to operationalize what she understands; i.e., follow-through, participatory management skills, a certain charisma, and the ability to model what she believes in.

The principals of Seaside and Clark schools were novices with only one and two years of experience, respectively. Both, however, had spent a week at a Stanford University Summer Academy learning about the accelerated school model. The principal of Seaside school, when asked what he would do differently during the early phase of introducing and clarifying the model for staff responded:

> I wish I would have had a better handle on the whole accelerated schools project, so that I could have answered some of the questions as to what exactly is the accelerated school. I really didn't know, I still don't know 100% because we haven't created it yet.

Teachers at Seaside school referred to their principal's leadership style as:

> He is very easy and goes along with what we want.

> He really tends to let people take over.

> He kind of sits back and observes.

> He's easy to get along with. Sometimes I think that the follow through doesn't come for what we talk about that we want to do.

> He doesn't tend to bring things up. Sometimes he's not aware of what's going on or problems unless it's brought up to him.

> I think he is very caring, always willing to listen, not aggressive, kind of a passive leader.

The principal as Seaside demonstrated some self-doubt and a limited conceptual understanding of accelerated schools. Furthermore, his leadership style appeared to be administrative or maintenance-oriented rather than proactive. He does not become actively involved and defers to his staff's requests.

Finally, the principal of Clark school echoed similar concerns to the same question of, "What would you have done differently during the early phase of introducing and clarifying the accelerated school model for staff?"

> Maybe I should have given them more information...Maybe what you need to do at the very beginning is share the ambiguity of the concept...Do they need lots of stuff in their boxes? Do the need lots of verbal things? Do they need video presentations or whatever? Do they need support people to come in? You have to be prepared with answers...because people are going to ask questions and they want answers.

Clark school teachers characterized their principal's leadership style as:

> I have sat down and talked to people one on one in small groups. The principal has not. She has been saying that she doesn't want to persuade people one way or another, but I think that she really hasn't said enough. She could have shared more information than she has. Because she doesn't want people to say, "Well you talked me into it or whatever."
>
> I think she is really concerned and wants to do things. But I don't think that she is quite sure how to do it effectively.
>
> I think that she probably has a lot to learn as far as leadership and directing.
>
> She doesn't become involved.
>
> Sometimes I am not sure that she is working from a basis of understanding of what's going on in the elementary classroom.

The principal at Clark school also demonstrated self-doubt and a great deal of "second guessing" about presenting and clarifying the accelerated school model. Additionally, she did not become actively involved during the courtship phase. She wanted her staff to feel as though it was their decision to become an accelerated school. A number of staff members felt that she did not understand or know what to do.

Certainly, it is important for principals to allow room for different points of view, underlying disagreements, and various staff concerns during the earliest phase of introducing and clarifying the model. But for staff, it appears to be most critical for the principal to be actively involved, modeling the process, and sending strong signals of being knowledgeable, confident, and possessing a "can do" attitude. Clearly the principal of Bridgeport school fulfilled these demands and the principals of Seaside and Clark schools did not.

Fullan (1982) describes two types of school principals, those who are primarily administrators and ad hoc crisis managers and those who are change agents. Change agents may become be either directive or facilitative leaders. However, directive principals need to clearly

understand the purpose of the change and have a critical mass of teachers who agree with them. Facilitative leaders, on the other hand, need both understanding and the skills to turn the change process over to their staffs. Clearly, the principal of Bridgeport school is a facilitative leader. She is committed to changing her school and possesses the skills to do so. While the other two principals had the "right instincts" to become change agents, they had less understanding, skills, or experience to initiate a whole-school restructuring process by themselves. Working with the guidance, assistance, and coaching of the project steering committee, however, they have been able to move their schools along, albeit at a slower and more laborious pace than Bridgeport school.

Understanding the change process. Principals need to understand the change process and develop a "game plan." Careful management of the restructuring process is critical, with a realization that change takes time, has predictable stages, and that there are no simple solutions. Bridgeport's principal clearly articulated the steps she took. At the opening faculty meeting in September she held a three hour workshop with a catered dinner in a local church.

> I just used accelerated schools stuff because I thought it sounded neat to me, neater than the stuff I had used before. I didn't really do that with the thought that I am trying to pave the way to move to accelerated schools, I just thought it looked good. As it turned out, that was a really great move.
>
> I never mentioned accelerated schools at that workshop, I didn't say boo about it. We did an Identifying Strengths activity, a Building on Strengths activity, we did that little grid about where decisions are made, because that was an issue that had come up.
>
> When people went to hear Levin, and also to some degree when they say the videotapes, there was a reaction of "Oh, you know we are already doing that," or "I knew about it already," it wasn't so much we don't need this, but they felt some sense of pride or accomplishment in having done it.

The principal of Bridgeport school subsequently had a staff meeting that focused on the key elements of the accelerated school model, the three guiding principles, curriculum, instruction, and school organization. She began the meeting by saying:

> Change is in the air. We do not have a choice about whether or not to change. We can't remain the same. But we do have a choice about how we will change.

Rather than directly explaining the key elements of the accelerated school model, the principal designed a cooperative learning "jigsaw" activity so that staff ended up explaining the model to each other in small groups. Chart paper was used and advantages and barriers were listed. "Burning questions" that remained were also listed. A conference call with teachers at the first accelerated school, Daniel Webster in San Francisco, was conducted. The staff of Bridgeport also visited Daniel Webster, which had been an accelerated pilot school beginning in 1986. The entire process was carefully orchestrated by the Bridgeport principal and no stone was left unturned, so to speak.

This is a powerful example of principal leadership and an intuitive understanding of the change process in the earliest phase of a school restructuring process. Leadership was indirect. Staff were led to feel as though they were ultimately making the decision to become an accelerated school. It became a relatively easy decision for them to make because they felt as though the model actually validated and reflected what they were already doing.

The principals of Clark and Seaside schools presented the model in a much more traditional, direct, but fragmented fashion, although their staffs also visited another accelerated school in the region as part of the courtship. Along the way both principals expressed doubts about sustaining the change process.

> I am really kind of in a quandary right now not knowing what the next step is. The people are asking what is next? A couple of them have maybe even forgotten about it because they are involved in so many things.
>
> There is a lot of things that I wonder about. Am I up to this? And there is so much to sort through.

Information was presented. The principals tried to answer a barrage of questions. Henry Levin made a presentation. Videotapes were made available, information was placed in teacher mail boxes, and visits to another accelerated school in the region were arranged. When voting, the Seaside principal even asked staff to sign their ballots while the Clark principal deliberately distanced herself from the voting process. Yet, although the staffs in these two schools eventually voted to become accelerated schools, they never really seemed to own the process as the staff at Bridgeport did.

It appears that an indirect approach in which teachers are obliged make sense of the model by actually practicing important components of it was far more successful in building commitment and moving the process along. This reflects what we know about learning, that learners learn more and are better able to transfer what they have learned when they must make sense of it themselves in an inductive way. What we conclude is that a inductive approach to learning about accelerated schools is far more powerful than a direct or deductive approach, especially in the earliest introductory stage. Furthermore, it makes much better sense to take this type of inductive approach with the accelerated school model because of the inherent value the model places in problem solving, critical thinking, and hands-on learning. It reflects the aphorism, "How you teach is what you teach."

Although Clark used a more traditional and direct approach in presenting the model, the principal did use the inductive approach in one instance to surface and resolve some initial

differences of opinion about accelerated schools. After the Hank Levin address, there was a polarization at Clark between some teachers who felt very positively about the model and an almost equal number who were less positive or very negative. Chapter 1 teachers were particularly concerned about how the model would affect their pull-out program. Some teachers also wanted the school to consider another school improvement model. Given this situation, the principal at Clark set up an activity where two committees were assigned to do further research on each model being considered. The whole staff then met to hear the reports and discuss each model. This activity provided for an open discussion and airing of concerns. At the end of this activity, everyone at the school felt that "we've had enough talk" and they were ready to vote on which of the two models they would like the school to pursue. (They chose accelerated schools.) This is an illustration of how building shared meaning and commitment must be more than just providing videotapes and canned presentations of the model. Courtships must also use the inductive learning approach to surface underlying disagreements and work them through before the decision to adopt or not adopt the model is made.

Understanding the experiences of other teachers. Teachers need to visit and observe other school sites and have conversations with teachers involved in the restructuring process. No one has more credibility and is better at "selling" the model than another teacher. Visits to two other accelerated schools (including Daniel Webster) were arranged for interested staff at all three schools. Staff, armed with camcorders, formed "action research" teams and boarded mini-vans and even a Greyhound bus to visit these schools. Upon returning, they shared their experiences with colleagues. Next, the schools held an "Accelerated School Reach Out" in which the three staffs came together and shared videotapes and stories. Finally, Bridgeport

school staff made a conference telephone call to the Daniel Webster accelerated school in San Francisco. Twelve Bridgeport staff members crammed into the principal's office and talked for an hour to nine Daniel Webster staff members over a speaker phone.

Teachers at Clark school had this to say about their visit to one of the accelerated schools in the region:

> I think that our trip to _____ made a big difference. We voted for accelerated schools, but it was real shaky and people were kind of like, "Well, let's give it a try." But we still had some underlying tones from some people who were trying to sabotage...There were three of us that went from this school and we are all very strong personalities. I took a third grade teacher aside and said so tell me the truth. You have been here all this time." I had met her before and she was out on yard duty. "Is this accelerated stuff really worth it?" She said, "Well yes, because I am teaching novels," I am doing this and I am doing that.
>
> The visit to _____ really clinched it for me. I mean we talked and discussed all the way up and all the way back.
>
> About understanding accelerated schools...I think there needs to be more hands-on, personal interchanging between other schools.
>
> Speaking to the principal in _____ and listening to the staff and parents...everybody feels as though they are part of a team. And they are an equal part of the team. This isn't our boss and we are little guys that make the machine work and do the work. We all decide, we all make decisions good or bad, we have to live with them.

Staff at Bridgeport school reported the results of the conference call and their visit to Daniel Webster:

> The conference call was really good because it made us know that yes, there really was a school...It was important because that was another step in connecting up with the reality of it. I think it's really hard to see theoretically. Then the people went down and that was really important because they came back with some really important impressions...They were real enthused. They gave us more information and raised a lot more questions...It just gives you the feeling that they've done it, it's there, it's concrete.

> Daniel Webster staff is very good at responding to your concerns and really understand what teachers fear because they are not afraid to talk about what the problems were and how they solved them. They're not afraid of being really honest.

What these experiences indicate is that teachers felt a great deal more confident about committing to the accelerated school model after visiting and talking with other teachers. Interestingly, they were given no recipes or assurances about what to do or how to do it. But they came away feeling that it was "concrete" rather than abstract and that in spite of continuously having to wrestle with implementation problems, the schools they visited were much better off because of their involvement in the accelerated school process.

When asked to evaluate the various courtship activities, teachers clearly felt that hearing it from their peers was much more credible than hearing it from the promoters or "experts." Thus, while many people liked Hank Levin's address to the three staffs (which included the villain-in-costume routine that he uses to make the point that remedial education has failed), just as many disliked it or had very mixed feelings about it. Those who had mixed feelings liked the content but felt that Levin's presentation was "too flashy" or that the villain routine was "patronizing." Teachers were much more interested in hearing about the model from other teachers than from, in the words of one teacher, "the guru."

Significantly, teachers who made the visits and conference calls now became responsible for explaining accelerated schools to their colleagues. Staff became actively involved in sharing their impressions and experiences. Principals were able to step back and let staff begin to own the eventual decision to become an accelerated school.

Vision

Vision is determined by understanding. A clear understanding of the model can lead to the development of a compelling vision. By the nature of the roles they play, central office administrators are more likely than teachers and principals develop a systemic or visionary perspective of school change, as brought out in the earlier discussion of the meaning of change. In describing district support for accelerated schools, a teacher from one of the schools made this observation:

> It's easier for people who are outside of the school to be more committed. They are really dealing more with the theory of it than the reality of it.

Four years ago, for example, two central office curriculum administrators and a local university professor (one of the paper's authors) began exploring ways to restructure some of the district's lowest achieving schools. All three had led significant school restructuring projects in the past and felt that the accelerated school model resonated well with their past experience and hopes for the future of public schooling. One of the administrators explained:

> Our vision was one of "school improvement through staff development." We began looking for a model or process that had been replicated in a number of settings, had a track record, and could possibly be transferred to a number of other schools fairly easily. None of it's easy, of course.
>
> We were willing to take risks...and are firm believers that kids who are not succeeding in our schools are not at-risk. It's their situation that's creating their lack of achievement.

After visiting several accelerated schools in California and Missouri a critical, but visionary sort of concern was raised by one of the central office administrators.

> Based on what we saw, we were very concerned that there not be too much emphasis placed on the structure and organization (of the restructuring process) because if our goal is to improve instruction for kids, the focus must stay on curriculum and instruction...otherwise the means becomes the end.

With this cautionary note, the initial central office group presented the accelerated model to other central office administrators and then to district principals with the hope that some of them would become interested enough to pursue and initiate the process at their school sites. Eventually, with the active support and encouragement of their immediate supervisor, the principals of Bridgeport, Clark, and Seaside school decided to become involved.

As previously mentioned, the accelerated school model was a good fit with the principals' own personal beliefs and values. To varying degrees it reflected and validated their personal visions. Conveniently, it came with a "built-in" vision and a set of guiding principles of what their schools could become. Rather than having to develop an entirely new vision for their schools from the ground up, their job became that of clarifying and elaborating this built-in vision so that it was understood, shared, and developed in a way responsive to their own school staff's particular context and needs.

The principals becomes keepers and promoters of their school's built-in vision rather than its primary creators or initiators. Vision was kept by introducing it and clarifying it, which provided direction and order in what was for many staff members an ambiguous and uncertain school restructuring environment. And the principals promoted the vision, to varying degrees, by creating a sense of urgency or a press for school change through active involvement or "pitching-in" at every possible opportunity and by the continuous modeling of appropriate behaviors.

The principals of Bridgeport, Clark, and Seaside schools shared similar values and beliefs, as brought out in the earlier discussion of the meaning of change. This is reflected in the fact that they decided to get involved in the first place. According to their supervisor, they

all have the "right instincts," but as described earlier their levels of understanding and experience are clearly different. Consequently, their visions of how their roles might change and how classrooms will eventually look are, as expected, different. For example, the principal of Bridgeport school (the school farthest along in the process of becoming an accelerated school) had a great deal to say about her changing role and how she would like to see classrooms.

> I won't have to be responsible for Monday faculty meetings. Teachers will take much more of a role in planning and carrying out the goals that we have set. There will be so much going on...there will be trouble figuring out what is happening. That is the way it was in my last school and I am sure that is the way it will be here. I won't have to initiate everything. We will be working in cadres and a steering committee. We will need to get training, group process training.
>
> I like to see an atmosphere in a classroom of community where there is careful attention paid to that responsibility...a community with a problem solving component, rather than just booting the kids out for misbehavior. And an attitude that kids who are misbehaving are misbehaving for a reason, that is usually a skill deficit and that it is primarily the class room teachers job to teach to that with the support we provide.
>
> I want good concept level math instruction...lots of manipulatives, lots of real life math experiences, very little text book. That would be the same in social studies and science. I want to see little pull-out. I want to see some really different looks at Chapter I.
>
> I want a curriculum that integrates around themes. You know when you are in a classroom following an integrated curriculum because it kind of looks like whatever they are doing at that point. You can tell what they are doing because they transform the hall outside. Now they are a rain forest or a coral reef. It would be kind of messy and interesting looking and not all neat and tidy and done by teachers. The trick is to stay within that integrated curriculum and yet still have some specific skill teaching when needed.

In contrast the principal of Seaside school had very little to say about his emerging role and the type of class rooms he would like to see.

> My role will change probably a little bit, but I don't see it changing significantly. I think that I will be doing basically an orchestration, like a conductor...Just kind of making sure that every thing is running smoothly.

> I would look for student achievement to be up. I would look for the reputation of Seaside school as a great place to be, to have kind of circulated. I think that there is going to be more and better communication.
>
> I think that building on the strengths that the students come to school with will be very important. We had a couple of kids here last year who were attendance problems...they were at the low end of the academic scale, but what they had done. I was talking to a police officer, they had stolen a car from the wrecking yard, some how pushed it home, and made it run. If we could build on those types of strengths that these kids have, you know just working and tinkering with something.

Finally, the principal of Clark school also had very little to say about future changes in her role. She had more to say about the classroom, but it was couched in terms of addressing current school problems rather than a vision of what might be.

> I am not sure how my role will change. It just depends on how this whole process goes. I may decide that it doesn't work, and I may find that it works better than I ever imagined. So I want to be open. I am going to need to be more responsible for making sure that people are doing the tasks they need to do, to coordinate that effort.
>
> Obviously our kids need to be accelerated because they are below. Maybe it is not a good match. We have big turnover. I hope to see some different instructional models...more cooperative learning activities, more cross age, cross grades kinds of things, better use of personnel resources...Chapter I, Music, and the secretary. There is not a lot of dialogue between classroom teachers and our specialists. What we don't have is articulation between the grades which I hope will impact our test scores. I think that staff are asking to make decisions, but they are going to have to be responsible for the decisions they are making.

We conclude that, ultimately, vision must be directed at teaching and learning. Clearly, the vision of the Bridgeport principal is the most developed and focused. She can see her role changing dramatically and can vividly envision classrooms in the future. The Seaside and Clark principals are less certain about the roles they will play. Their descriptions of classrooms are at more at a "buzz word" level; i.e. "cooperative learning," "higher achievement," " building

on strengths," etc. They talk more of addressing current school problems than of the future and what their schools might become.

Murphy (1990; 1991) aptly points out that changing the core technology of schooling, teaching and learning, as a strategy for school restructuring has received little attention compared to other strategies like teacher empowerment, school based management, and choice. He and others suggest that we should actually begin with teaching and learning and that it is entirely possible to "restructure a school and have no real impact on the classroom and students (Epstein, 1988; Fullan, Bennett & Rolheiser-Bennett 1989). Thus, when principal vision is not clearly focused on teaching, learning, and classrooms, the means of school restructuring may actually become the ends.

Summary

School principals were central in building commitment to school restructuring during the "courtship" phase. Patterns of leadership pertaining to principal understanding and vision emerged as critical in building staff commitment to the accelerated school model and moving the process along.

Three key findings related to understanding became apparent: First for staff, the principal needs to be actively involved, must model the process, and must send strong signals of being knowledgeable, confident, and possessing a "can do" attitude. Second, principals need to understand the change process and develop a "game plan." It appears that an indirect approach of presenting and clarifying the model, in which teachers are obliged to make sense of the model by actually practicing and engaging in important components of it, is far more

successful than a direct approach where information is simply presented. Third, understanding the experiences of staff already involved in the process is very important. Teachers feel more confident about committing to a school restructuring process when they can visit and talk with other teachers, principals, and parents.

Finally, two key findings related to vision became apparent. First, accelerated schools come with a built-in vision and a set of guiding principles of what schools may become. Rather than having to develop an entirely new vision from the ground-up, the principal's job becomes that of clarifying and elaborating this built-in vision so that it is understood, shared, and developed in a way responsive to their own school staff's particular context and needs. Second, to be effective and inspiring, principals need clear pictures of their changing roles and how classrooms might look in the future.

These five key findings demonstrate how inextricably principal understanding and vision are linked. One is impossible without the other.

6. Lessons Learned and Conclusions

This section presents lessons learned and conclusions based on the findings presented in the previous two sections. We offer these not as hard truths, but as working propositions about implementing whole-school change projects like accelerated schools, particularly in the early stages. This section then ends with a brief discussion of another issue that emerged as we were studying the courtship and early implementation: the issue of *time for reform.*

The Meaning of Change

People in different organizational roles see the meaning of the school change project in their own unique way. District administrators take the most systemic and visionary view (i.e., the need for whole-school change, for a tight integration between school decisions and good curricular and instructional practices in the classroom, and viewing the project in a larger district or state political context), while teachers focus on how the change will address more local and isolated problems, especially those related to their immediate worklives and to the success of their students. This is consistent with much about we know about the sociology of teaching and how teachers adopt a "practicality ethic" when evaluating change projects (Lortie, 1975; Fullan, 1982; Rosenholtz, 1989).

While meanings may differ by organizational role, well-planned courtship activities, combined with a model like accelerated schools that has a very strong and clear set of guiding principles or a "built-in" vision, can result in a fairly high degree of shared meaning as the project moves into its early implementation. Meaning is socially constructed reality. Courtship activities, such as those described in this project, can become a way to create social cohesion

and shared meaning among participants at different organizational levels and with different perspectives on the problems facing education and the school itself. This will not necessarily eliminate all conflicts and differing points of view, nor should such differences ever be completely eliminated anyway less the school adopt a "groupthink" approach to problem solving as it moves into its new governance and site-based decision making. What courtship activities can be designed to do is provide a vehicle to air initial conflicts and address different subjective meanings as the change process begins.

While courtship can be used to build some initial shared meaning, a whole-school transformation model like accelerated schools is inherently vague and this can cause a sense of ambiguity and uneasiness for teachers who are more used to being told what to do. Ironically, teachers simultaneously gravitate towards the power of "creating our own school" and being involved in the decision making process, and also feel uncomfortable and even threatened by the heavy responsibility this places on their shoulders. "Creating our own school" is a paradigm shift for most teachers who are more used to prepackaged reforms. This feeling of ambiguity and discomfort, left unattended, has the potential to sap any initial enthusiasm teachers may feel towards powerful ideas like decision making with responsibility, unity of purpose, and building on strengths.

How can ambiguity be counteracted? The results of this study point to a countervailing force which we called *fit*. Change agents must pay attention to where the model already fits well with what teachers and schools are doing, or want to do as part of their vision for change. Pointing out how the model fits and how it can help staffs do the things they want to do even better can help alleviate some of the discomfort due to ambiguity or the fear of change itself.

The Role of Leadership

When introducing and clarifying the accelerated school model during the courtship phase, it is important for principals to allow room for different points of view, underlying disagreements, and various staff concerns. But most importantly for staff, the principal needs to be actively involved. He or she must possess a "can do" attitude, model the process, and send strong signals to the staff of being knowledgeable and confident.

An indirect approach of presenting the model, in which teachers are obliged to make sense of the model by actually practicing and engaging in important aspects of it, appears to be far more effective than a direct approach where information is simply presented. Leadership becomes indirect and staffs are let to feel as though it is truly their decision to become an accelerated school. Understanding the experiences of other staffs already involved in the process is also very important. Teachers feel more confident about committing to a school restructuring process when they can visit and talk with other teachers, principals, and parents. In this study, teachers generally felt that learning about accelerated schools from their peers was much more credible than hearing it from promoters or experts. Perhaps the clearest lesson learned is that teachers want courtship to be an opportunity for informed choice rather than a "hard sell."

Accelerated schools come with a "built-in" vision and a set of guiding principles of what schools may become. Rather than having to develop an entirely new vision from the ground-up, the principal's job becomes that of clarifying and elaborating this built-in vision so that it is

understood, shared, and developed in a way responsive to their own school staff's particular context and needs.

Principals become keepers and promoters of their school's built-in vision rather than its primary creators or initiators. Vision is kept by introducing the model and clarifying it. Presenting information inductively can provide direction and order in what, for many staff members, is an ambiguous and uncertain school restructuring environment. Vision is promoted by creating a sense of urgency or a press for school change through active involvement and appropriate modeling.

To be effective and inspiring, principals need clear visions of how their roles will change and how classrooms will eventually look. Ultimately, vision must be directed at teaching and learning or school restructuring may wash over the classroom and the means (such as the creation of new governance structures) will become the ends. Finally, principal understanding and vision are inextricably linked. One is impossible without the other and both need to be continuously developed and cultivated.

The Emerging Issue of Time for Reform

We end this paper with a brief discussion of the issue of time. This issue came up during the courtship and early training and development phases, and it was something that participants were even more concerned about when looking ahead. Hence, we bring time up as an issue primarily for continued research as these sites move into changing their governance structures and their school culture.

A recent RAND report on *Time for Reform* (Purnell & Hill, 1992; p. v) makes the following statement about the importance of time in the school reform process.

> An integral part of any attempt to restructure a school is the need to create time for the school staff to help design, endorse, and enact that reform. What makes this requirement such a challenge is that schools must continue the process of education for their students while instigating changes in the organization, curriculum or pedagogy of the school...Time is a finite resource. Simply adding school reform to the list of "things to do" trivializes the process and reduces the time available for every item on the list.

In our study of the early implementation phase, *finding time* for courtship and restructuring activities and the *timing and pacing* of the courtship activities themselves were two recurrent themes. Both of these facets of time are equally important. Our experience indicates that schools should be prepared to devote two to three months to introducing and clarifying the accelerated school model. Some staff members will become impatient and want to "get on with it," while others will need more time and information to make a decision. Finding time for discussion and reflection is critical. As pointed out earlier, any underlying disagreements or concerns about the model should be surfaced during the courtship. Finally, awareness building activities should be staged at regular and frequent intervals so that the initial interest and excitement do not wane.

Finding the time for reform is a fundamental problem. As the participants in our school restructuring effort reflected on the courtship and what lied ahead, there was a recurrent concern about finding time for new activities in an accelerated school, such as the weekly problem solving meetings of cadres. As one teacher stated, "we are already over extended time wise and stress wise." Staffs will certainly need to reconcile their personal and professional lives. A number of approaches to solving the problem of time did emerge, however, from our interviews

and from our experiences in facilitating the project. School staffs will need to think in terms of "working smarter, not harder." They will also need district support for release time to participate in new activities, and they will need to sense that district and university support will continue for the duration of the change process. The district may also have to relax mandates and avoid inundating the school with top-down programs so that the school restructuring effort can be the center of everyone's time and attention. Finally, school staffs will need to learn of the many creative ways that accelerated schools and similar reform efforts around the country have "captured" time, from "banking" time to making a restructuring of school time an object of the reform itself.

In closing, this study was based on the premise that comprehensive school change efforts frequently underestimate the importance of first steps in building commitment and shared meaning for participants. The literature is replete with examples of what Sarason (1990) calls the predictable failures of school reform. This study addressed the need to establish early commitment and shared meaning to a change process like accelerated schools which requires great personal energy and long-term commitment among all participants.

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